GEN

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

3 1833 02606 9192

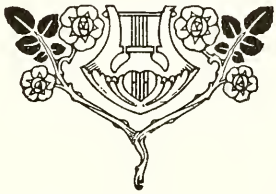
Gc 977.202 F77geo
Sadler, Hilary A.
Mother George

Mother George

Fort Wayne's Angel of Mercy

BY

Hilary A. Sadler



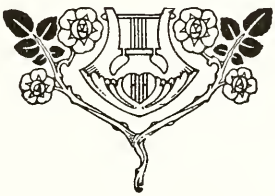
Mrs. Eliza E. George
1808 - 1865

Mother George

Fort Wayne's Angel of Mercy

BY

Hilary A. Sadler



Prepared by the Staff of the
Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County

1964

Allen County Public Library
900 Webster Street
PO Box 2270
Fort Wayne, IN 46801-2270

Board of Trustees of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County

Charles Slater, President
Allan J. Tremper, Vice-President
Phillip Sanborn, Secretary
Arthur J. Meyer, Treasurer
Mrs. Richard E. Buirley
Leslie S. Fry
Mrs. Mark Knoblauch

Public Library Board for Allen County

The members of this board include the members of the above board (with the same officers) together with the following citizens chosen from Allen County outside the corporate city of Fort Wayne.

Mrs. Frank Dulin
James E. Graham
Gerald W. Morsches
Mrs. Charles Reynolds

FOREWORD

This essay on the career of Mother George, Civil War nurse, was originally published in four installments in Sunday issues of the Fort Wayne JOURNAL-GAZETTE, on November 24, December 1, 8, and 15. Mother George, as she was affectionately denominated by the soldiers who knew her, was definitely but mysteriously connected with Fort Wayne and possibly with the Sion Bass family. Mr. Hilary Sadler, the author has pursued the faint trails she has left and has assembled all available facts. The search has been long and baffling. The attainment of the meager results however is a subject for high commendation. At long last a colorful character has been rescued from obscurity; her indubitable merits both humane and patriotic have been heralded; and one more of Fort Wayne's long list of eminent men and women has been elevated to her rightful place in our hall of fame.

Mr. Sadler has worked long and with all available media. He has exhausted all known pertinent materials. Unfortunately it is likely that nothing will ever be added to the story supplied by his indefatigable researches.

The original text as published in the Fort Wayne JOURNAL-GAZETTE has been subjected to some editorial emendation in the interest of brevity; some rhetorical changes have brought the text in harmony with practices employed in other publications of this library.

Mrs. Eliza E. George, known to Indiana Civil War soldiers as Mother George, accompanied Hoosier troops through battles and skirmishes for two and a half years before falling victim to an attack of typhoid fever at Wilmington, North Carolina. She died just one month to the day after Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia. Eliza George never knew of her fame. It came after her death, but it served to make her name a household word a century ago.

Mrs. George was the first and perhaps the only woman to be interred in a local cemetery with full military honors . . . a tribute which she fully deserved. She was buried at Lindenwood in the family plot of Fort Wayne's other great Civil War hero, Col. Sion S. Bass who had fallen at the Battle of Shiloh. The Sanitary Commission of Indiana erected a granite monument to her memory. Today, this weathered old shaft is the only visible marker for her grave a dozen yards away. Maps of Fort Wayne in 1874 and 1895 show that a street was named for her. Only the marker on the wall above a paint store on Broadway remains to recall her existence. "The Last Train from Atlanta," by A.A. Hoehling, published in 1958, is one of a dozen or more historical works which refers to Mother George from Fort Wayne, Indiana. Nothing else remains of the fame of this great lady. A diligent search of newspaper microfilm files, dusty old city files, and church records, revealed only one brief reference to her. The records of The First Methodist Church of Fort Wayne, then known as Berry Street Church, prove that she was a full member of

that congregation. A single line entry states that "Elizabeth George, widow, died of the Great Fever in North Carolina." The Lindenwood burial records refer to her as "George."

The epitaph on Elizabeth George's monument in Lindenwood Cemetery laconically indicates that she was born at Bridport, Vermont, October 20, 1808. A search of all clues furnished very few additional facts on her personal life. She was born Elizabeth Hamilton and later married a W. L. George.

The early Fort Wayne City Directory lists Mrs. George as residing on the north side of Berry Street between Barr and Lafayette. There were no street numbers then in suburban areas. In 1860 the census report lists:

Eliza George--Landlady, Age 42, $400
Belle George--Housemaid, Age 21, Born New York
Jennie George--Housemaid, Age 16, Born Kentucky

All three were listed as residing at the same address, on the north side of Wilt between Fulton and Broadway. There the record ends, except that in 1861 her daughter, Belle, resided at 139 W. Washington. It was not until recent weeks that the long forgotten will of daughter Belle disclosed the fact Mrs. George had a third daughter, Eliza M.

These scanty records comprise all tangible evidence of the life of Eliza George in Fort Wayne prior to January, 1863. Then, more than 50 years of age, she applied for acceptance as a nurse with the Indiana Agent of the Sanitary Commission, a forerunner of the Army Nurse Corps.

Writing in 1866, Frank More reported in his WOMEN OF THE WAR, that

. . . sometime in January, 1863, Mr. Hanna-

The Fort Wayne street that was the site of Mrs. George's last home here, was named for her some time after the end of the conflict as this picture shows. The street, however, has long since been renamed, and only the meaningless marker on the side of this store remains as the city's only recognition of its greatest heroine.

man, the General Military agent for the State of Indiana, received a note from correspondents at Fort Wayne, recommending Mrs. E. E. George of their city as a lady well qualified to serve as a hospital nurse. A few days later, Mrs. George called on him; she tendered her services. He could not at that moment assign her to a field of labor, and she went to Chicago, hoping to find her services required by the Sanitary Commission. While there, Mr. Hannaman received advices from Memphis, informing him of a great demand there for care and treatment of those who were wounded at the first assault on the Southern defenses at Vicksburg. Hospital transports had brought the wounded to Memphis; a large number of nurses could find immediate employment there. He telegraphed at once to Mrs. George and she presented herself at the Sanitary rooms. Her age constituted a barrier to her employment; she had reached that period in life which suggests the quiet of the fireside and the comforts of home, rather than a rude, changing and wearing succession of exhausting toils and midnight vigils. This objection was suggested to her. "True," she replied, "I am old; but my health is good, and I desire to do something for those who every day expose their lives for our country. If unable to go through as much as some, I will engage never to be at all troublesome or in the way."

The opposition on technical grounds to Mrs. George collapsed. She was accepted.

With those words Eliza George, 54 years old, went to war and made nursing history. With a group of other Hoosier women, Eliza George arrived in Memphis, Tennessee, in the spring of 1863 and remained there until the fall of that year. The overworked Army doctors and hard-pressed staff officers soon realized her value as a nurse. Her dedication

and the rising tide of battle casualties readily gained for her official permission to work in every ward in all the hospitals in Memphis. Governor Morton of Indiana sent her a special order to inquire after and care for all the sick and wounded of the Indiana regiments. She honored this request without exception to the end of her career.

Officially little is known of Eliza George. The only remaining reference to her in the files of the National Archives concerns this early period of her career. A hospital Muster Roll card dated March and April, 1863, indicates that she was attached as a nurse on those dates to the Union U.S.A. Hospital, Memphis, Tennessee.

Frank More in his book, speaks of her indoctrination into the horrors of war,

> Her excellent practical sense, and the Christian meekness of her character made her a suitable person to be invested with unusual authority, while her age and the elevation of her motives won involuntary respect and admiration from all those with whom she was connected. During the spring and summer of 1863 her labors in Memphis hospitals were unceasing. Early in the fall of that year she permitted herself a short respite, visiting her friends in Fort Wayne, but in October she returned to Memphis.

Mrs. George's compassion for the suffering of the wounded and dying, earned for her the title of "Mother." She carried the name to her grave and it alone appears in the inscription on the tombstone which she shares with a daughter in Lindenwood Cemetery.

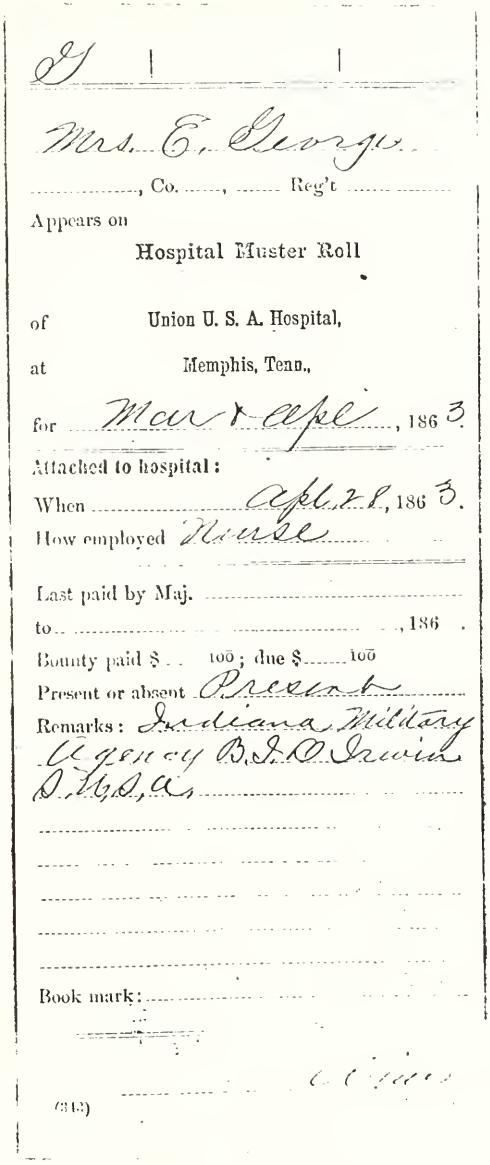
Only two known letters from Mother George remain; portions of several others that have long since disappeared are quoted in THE SOLDIER OF

INDIANA IN THE WAR FOR THE UNION by Merrill and Company. One is datelined Memphis, Tennessee, May 18, 1863, evidently written to her two grown daughters, Belle and Jennie, living at the time in Fort Wayne. It reads in part, "My Dear Ones . . . It would make your heart ache to go through the long wards and see the pale faces, the sad and sorrowful eyes that follow your every step."

Returning from leave in Fort Wayne in October, 1863, Mother George was transferred to Corinth, Mississippi. Operations in the Western Theater now began to stabilize and to move from Vicksburg to Eastern Tennessee. She made frequent trips between Memphis and Corinth, a distance of about 80 miles. Her duties included the delivery from the Sanitary Commission of hospital supplies and comforts to the men. The wagons in which she rode with her precious supplies were often fired on by guerillas and squads of Confederate cavalry; possibility of death in the line of duty did not seem to phase her.

The only two known existing letters penned by Mother George were written during her stay here in Corinth. They were brought to light recently among the effects of Alan T. Nolan, Indianapolis attorney. William J. Nolan of Company I of the 66th Indiana Volunteers was the latter's great-grandfather. William Nolan died on November 3, 1863, at the Army hospital at Corinth, Mississippi; he was buried in the National Cemetery there. Mother George was his nurse. Although her duties did not require it, she wrote this letter to Nolan's widow:

> Mrs. Nolan--Enclosed is $10 which your husband entrusted to my care to send you; he is or was very sick when I left Corinth last Saturday but I presume you will get a letter telling you all this which was written at his request last week. It is no safer



Mrs. E. George

....., Co. ....., ... Reg't .....

Appears on

Hospital Muster Roll

of Union U. S. A. Hospital,

at Memphis, Tenn.,

for March & April, 1863.

Attached to hospital:

When April 28, 1863.

How employed Nurse

Last paid by Maj. .....

to ....., 186 .

Bounty paid $ 100; due $ 100

Present or absent Present

Remarks: Indiana Military Agency B.I.D. Irwin D.M.G.A.

Book mark:

(312)

This faded Muster Roll card is a mute reminder of Mother George's first hospital assignment at Memphis, Tenn. The card is the only remaining evidence of her service found in the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

to send money by Express now than it is by mail. Your Husband thought I should send it in a letter if you get this write me immediately direct to Mrs. E. E. George Memphis Tenn in care of Dr. Jobes Indiana Agent and I will send you more I return to Corinth tomorrow but the Dr. will forward me your letter.

My Dear Mrs. Nolan your Husband is perfectly resigned and wishes you to remember God doeth all things well he is well taken care of has a good lady nurse and I am here to procure comforts for the sick I hope he may get well but should he not he wishes you to keep the family together and not let the boys go into the Army answer immediately with much love for you in your trials I remain your friend . . . Mrs. E. E. George, Sanatary Agent for Ind.

Mrs. George had no knowledge, of course, that Mr. Nolan died the same day her letter was written. When General Sherman's Army left Corinth a few days later and moved up the Tennessee River to reinforce Grant at Chattanooga, Mother George also left. While aboard the Steamer Arizona on November 25, 1863, she wrote the second letter, directed to Gay, Mr. Nolan's oldest son. It reads:

Your letter was handed me on board the Arizona the morning I left Corinth & I hasten to reply knowing the agony of suspense. I would surely have rendered all the assistance in my power had I remained at Corinth as it is can only give you a more minute ac't of the last days and wishes of your Dear Father. I did not go to Corinth until the last week of Your Father's pilgrimage found him very sick and desirous of conversing of home and the things that pertain to the Spirit-Land Said he had served his country faithfully & laid down his life in a just and good cause & if the Lord Jesus called for him he was

ready and willing to go. He wished your Mother to keep the children together and teach them to love their God and the Country their Father had given his life to save. He repeated the words "to save for madam, it will be saved."

And I believed him too. He was not suffering much, but was wasted very much in flesh. He rec'd every attention after we went to the hospital and appeared to think if we had come sooner he would have lived. There was no female nurses there until I went and took 3 ladies & a good supply of Sanatary Stores & if there is a man in America opposed to Lady Nurses let him be sick in hospital left to the tender mercies of male nurses & they half sick at that & I think his prejudices will be removed. A woman that is what God made her & intended that should be will be a lady in hospital & everywhere else. I was not with your Father when his Spirit took its flight having been sent back to Memphis to get supplies for the hospital he fell asleep the night after I left, I do not know that he had any keepsake he gave me his money to send I enclosed 10 dol. to your Mother as he directed & will send 10 more from Cairo.

I was on the Arizona when I received your letter but I showed it to the Doct. in charge and the Gen. Ward Master requesting as a favour to myself they would render every assistance in their power should you send for the Body which they promised. I am on my way to Chatinoga to help establish a Hospital posibly I may be at Evansville if I do and stop long enough I will surely find your Mother. My Young Friend I may never see your face but I honour and respect you for the kind filial and affectionate manner you speak of your Father. May God bles you Make you an honour to your Country & your Name & in a coming day give you a seat at his right hand. The boat rocks so I can hardly write, what you can not

read you must gues with Respect I remain . . . Your Well Wisher, Mrs. E. E. George . . . He often spoke of your Mother & remembered his children with all of a Father's love.

A final request of Soldier Nolan was passed along to his widow, but it is noticeably missing in Mother George's touching letter to his son. Her fierce pride in her work was exceeded only by her love for her country. It would never permit her to suggest to young Gay Nolan that his Father desired him never to enter the Army.

While Mother George thought she was enroute to Chattanooga with Sherman's troops late in 1863, she was sidetracked at Pulaski, Tennessee, some 70 miles south of Nashville. With the assistance of Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Bickerdyke, both well-known Civil War nurses, she opened a military hospital at Pulaski and remained there several months. During this period she made several trips to Indiana, not to visit, but to collect needed hospital supplies and to transport them to Pulaski. She did her best to distribute promptly the stores of drugs, clothing and food when they arrived. Her boys believed they could count on her even when the military was bogged down in red tape.

Her success in slicing through military tape is testified to in this glowing tribute written by the doctor in charge of the Pulaski hospital and printed in the May 27, 1864, issue of the Fort Wayne DAILY GAZETTE.

Pulaski, Tenn.
April 12, 1864

To The Ladies Soldiers' Aid Society
Fort Wayne, Ind.

I am happy for the opportunity of bearing testimony in Behalf of the valuable services of your faithful and efficient agent, Mrs. E. E. George.

It was my fortune to have charge of the Pulaski General Hospital in its infancy. During several weeks of this time more than a hundred brave men prostrated by disease and wounds were without change of beds or bed clothes in which deplorable condition several died. But for the appearance of Mrs. George and her sanitary stores, I know not how long this distress must have continued. Stores that she had guarded through an entire week (God bless her brave motherly heart) of inclement December weather during their tedious passage from Nashville, but I do know that her arrival wrought a Christian miracle--that scores of languishing soldiers were suddenly purified and clad in garments of sufficient elegance and great comfort.

Furthermore I know that her Sanitary delicacies for the sick man's palate have proved of great benefit and those who were laboring under extreme physical prostration have had at times only Mrs. George to look to for such stimulants as were necessary to hold soul and body together.

Now, while I acknowledge the valuable and timely relief from your worthy agent I am not unmindful of the labors and generous contributions from the devoted and patriotic ladies of chivalrous Indiana and more especially of such of them as compose the human society I have now the pleasure to address, and whose humble servant I have the honor to be.

Wm. Flearry
Surgeon 12th Illinois

In June of 1864 Mother George was on the move again. A letter written to her friends in Fort Wayne

appeared in the June 10, 1864, issue of the DAILY GAZETTE. Her vivid word picture of the horrors of war displays not only the compassion that made her one of this country's great heroines, but also illustrates the fact that she was a better than average war correspondent.

Chattanooga,
June 1, 1864

Ed. Gazette I left Huntsville, Alabama on the 8th of May, about 12 o'clock at night-dark as dark nights can be. Within three miles of Stevenson we were fired into by the guerrillas and our engineer badly wounded . . . Fortunately we had two engineer on the train proceeded with safety to this place. I stopped at the room of the US Commission where I received every attention in their power to render.

Mr. Turner, our agent here procured an ambulance and Col. Taylor of Ohio was my escort to the hospital. I found want existing everywhere--want that could be alleviated by proper attention.

On Monday morning at 7 o'clock in company with Mrs. Horner and our state agent I started in the hospital train for Kingston, Georgia after a load of wounded. Kingston is some 75 or 80 miles from this place.

We arrived in time to witness one of the saddest sights I ever witnessed. An ambulance train brought in 1200 wounded men. A large number were slightly wounded or at least in hands and feet, some with two fingers carried away, some through the hand, etc. There were 75 with amputated legs and arms some wounded in the head, in feet, in every form and manner. They were of the 20th Corps., Hooker's division, in which was the 27th, 33rd, 85th and 70th regiment. They all suffered there full share.

Col. McDougal, of the 133rd New York Inft., lost his right leg and though suffering intensely, was enthusiastic for his country, and only regretted that he could do no more. A Captain Bigelow of the 19th Michigan, died in the cars on the way down and three more in a dying condition.

The report from the front was both armies had fought hard all day. (30th) with out any particular advantage on either side, the rebels falling back within their breast works at night.

The rebels shelled our hospital at Dallas and wounded many the second time.

I leave tomorrow for Kingston and shall remain there until it ceases to be a stopping place for our wounded. I never more heartily blessed the Sanitary Commission than I did last Monday night. Mr. Merrit, our Relief Agent was here, and he not only did honor humanity's cause but to the state he represents. There is room for men like him. He is going to open a room at Kingston.

Every foot of country here shows it is the theater of war. I am sitting in sight of Look Out Mountain and wondering how our people ever scaled its summit, and for ages to come it will be a wonder.

The 44th is here doing provost duty. Col. Aldredge, who has just left the office, reports his men healthy and in good condition. The Col. is looking well.

The rebels owe us a spite and like to express it whenever they dare. They put a torpedo on the railroad track between Huntsville and Stevenson the other night, which was accidently exploded by an old horse roaming around.

The hour has expired, and wishing to be remembered to all my friends, I remain yours truly,

Mrs. E. E. George

With Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Bickerdyke, she shared the hardships of Sherman's 15th Corps as they moved into Georgia and fought Joe Johnston's stubbornly dogged Confederates across the bloody miles to Resaca, Kennesaw Mountain and finally before the portals of Atlanta.

Through the entire North Georgia Campaign she worked in the field . . . sometimes at the front, often at night as well as all day. She tended the wounded after the battles, bandaging their wounds and giving them water to ease their parched throats. She frequently worked to the extent of her endurance; wrapped in a rough Army blanket she would fall asleep under a tree or a wagon only to be awakened in a few hours by the pitiful moans of the suffering men around her. Excerpts from two notes written at Marietta, Georgia, shortly after the battle of Kennesaw Mountain tell of the wearing effects of this cruel day and night pace:

> Our soldiers are becoming exhausted physically, but their spirit is stronger and more defiant than ever. I am perfectly astonished to hear them talk, even while they are writhing with the pain of crushed and amputated limbs.

A letter, to her daughters in Fort Wayne, dealt with her deep spiritual concern for her home, herself and her country. She said in part:

> Strive above all petty considerations to make your home happy, to make it what it should be, a holy, happy place. I want you should kneel down together every night and pray for your absent mother and your suffering country.

The latter two notes, quoted in a publication

dated 1869, undoubtedly were polished with liberal applications of literary liberty. The grammar, the punctuation and the spelling differ considerably from the original notes written to the Nolan family.

As Joe Johnston continued his defensive maneuvering before Sherman's onrushing troops, he retired into the protective confines of Atlanta. There a dissatisfied Confederate high command relieved him and substituted the reckless old war horse, John Bell Hood. After a prolonged siege, Atlanta fell. Mother George now became connected with the 15th Corps Hospital. When this Corps marched on Jonesboro, south of Atlanta, Mother George at the earnest request of the men themselves, became the only woman to accompany them.

Just four days before the decisive Battle of Jonesboro, Mother George penned her last dispatch to the readers of the DAILY GAZETTE. In this letter she mentions several Fort Wayne soldiers and proves to be a master of understatement as she describes her feelings as a shell exploded within seven yards of where she had been standing but moments before.

U.S. Sanitary Commission
Hospital 4th Division,
15th Army Corps,
Near Atlanta, Aug. 25th, 1864

Ed. Gazette I want to give you a little idea of where I am and what I am doing ere I leave this beautiful spot, which might be termed a sylvan retreat were it not for the cries of distress and the moans of the dying which hourly assail my ears. I am within two miles of Atlanta, have seen the city a number of times from a hill a short distance from Camp. The hill, so densely shaded with forest trees, that we cannot be seen, otherwise we might be shelled out, as it

is within range of their lead messengers. Upon our right is the Hospital of the 1st and 2nd divisions, a little to our left is the hospitals of the 16th and 17th Army Corps, and altogether we make a very respectable little city--like all other cities, we have our resting place for the dead; attached to each division is a spot of ground (rudely enclosed) where sleep those noble, brave, heroic men that have battled for the right and given their lives to save their country from being made a second Mexico. A board with the same rank and regiment marks each grave, and though the thunder of cannon is hourly sounding in our ears, it will disturb their slumbers no more. We have but 22 in our hospital today, not including surgeons and attendants. We have sent our sick and wounded to Marietta, preparatory to a move. I have a tent very well filled with Sanitaries; it is something of a novelty, being the first and only thing of the kind thus far in the front and elicits much praise for Ind. But I am not indebted to Indiana alone for my goods; the Christian, United States and Western Commissions each have supplied me liberally, and will continue to while I continue to give good satisfaction of a distributor. I have been very fortunate in securing the confidence of the other Commissions. It enables me to distribute more generously and my heart fairly dances with joy when I get an opportunity to send anything to the men lying in the rifle pits. My tent is far famed and receives as many customers as a fancy store and I hope my friends at home will aid in keeping up my stock of goods.

August 26--I shall finish this letter and send it if it is in two pieces. Yesterday I layed aside my letter to attend to supper. The order came to move; we ate our supper and in 30 minutes were loaded up and drove out of the lines, drove about 2 miles. Some of the men complained of Dr. Kates' selection of

ground. It was on a hill directly opposite, and in range of a rebel battery. The men were ordered to take the horses from the ambulances, but not unharness them. I made my bed in the ambulance, and slept finely--soon after daylight there came a shell and exploded within 30 yards of us--those who knew the danger, expressed more fear than I did. Soon came another about 10 yards nearer. Our division started without orders, and within 10 minutes after we left, came another one that exploded within 7 yards of where we stood; we were standing in the advance line. Had we remained there much longer we might have been hurt, or badly scared at least. We are now in a beautiful place awaiting orders, have not unloaded or pitched a tent. I am sitting in the ambulance writing; have just eaten my dinner, am suffering more from a heated atmosphere today than any other dav this summer.

If the rebels do not conclude to quietly evacuate Atlanta today or tonight we may possibly take a little trip South. Should we get along well, so that my services could be dispensed with, don't you think it would be a good idea for me to attend the Fair? Dr. Moore tells me that if I get this letter mailed for many days I shall be indebted to some carrier for it. We have cut loose from all communication North, and it may be days, or weeks before we will again be within reach of postal communications. If I am taken prisoner I must abide my time. The little good I have enabled to do today, has more than paid me for the risk. Major Baldwin, Captain Nelson, George A. Craw and Captain Farran were to see me yesterday. The men are all well but wearied. This has been a long, hard campaign, and our troops are all wearied physically, but the spirit is strong, the convictions of right and duty as firm as ever. If the defenders of our flag and national honor were not classed with

felons and denied the right of citizenship our pending elections would be all right.

August 29--It would be contraband to tell you where I am, but I am in the midst of war 30 miles from a place of acknowledged safety. It will doubtless be many days ere I can hear from home again. We are where there are but two ways to settle the question, success in battle or a foot race. Our troops have thus far been successful in all they have undertaken. I humbly pray the God of Hosts they may continue to be--military men pronounce this one of the greatest movements of the day. I am pained to learn the state of things at home and Indianapolis. Is it possible that our country is to be bartered cheaper than Esau sold his birthright? I have a chance to send this to headquarters and must close. My health is good.

Mrs. E. E. George

The Indianapolis NEWS of February 6, 1901, relates two stories about Mother George that are typical of her devotion to duty and great feeling for the men whom she tended. The NEWS relates:

On one occasion she sat for 20 hours holding a wounded soldier in her arms and applying ice to stop the flow of blood from a wound. There was nobody to relieve her, but once or twice when relief was made available, the soldier begged so hard for her to stay that she forgot her own weariness and applied the ice again.

On another occasion when the shells were falling in and around the hospital tent, she lifted the wounded, one after another and carried them in her arms to a place of greater safety.

This weathered granite shaft was erected to the memory of Mother George and her service to humanity by the Indiana Sanitary Commission in 1865. It stands in a triangular plot across the road from her virtually unmarked grave in Lindenwood.

In spite of her tenderness with the men, she could really get tough with the brass when the treatment of "her boys" was at stake. The Indianapolis NEWS reports,

> On still another occasion, she found a soldier suffering intense torture because the surgeon, in dressing his wound, had drawn the ligatures too tight. She went in search of the surgeon and found him asleep. Awakening him, she told the story of the ligatures and the suffering soldier. He refused to loosen them and turned over to go to sleep again. This fired Mrs. George, and she denounced him for his heartlessness and declared she would take it on herself to change the bandages. He told her that if she did he would have her turned away from the hospital. She defied him and loosened the bandages and the soldier soon fell into a peaceful sleep.
>
> The next morning there was open war between her and the surgeon, but she so strongly appealed to the Medical Director that the surgeon was dismissed and ordered out of camp.

In the fall of 1864 Sherman's army returned from Jonesboro to Atlanta. After burning Atlanta he began his march to Savannah and the sea on November 15. Mother George, in need of a brief period of rest, then took leave of the victory-flushed troops and returned to Fort Wayne. The tempting comforts of home did not long contain her, however; she soon returned to the fatigue and hardships of army life at Nashville, Tennessee. Arriving here, enroute to rejoin her old comrades at Atlanta, she found that Sherman's Corps had resumed their march through Georgia. As Sherman's forces abandoned their supply line and began to live off the land, communications with his headquarters had been severed. Mother

George therefore spent the winter of 1864-65 at Nashville. During the siege of that city by General J. B. Hood, the defeated Confederate general from Atlanta, Mother George and two other ladies opened a Hospital. They tended those who were wounded not only during the siege, but also from the subsequent battle that saw the rout of the Confederate army which fled across the Tennessee River.

Eliza George then composed the last letter that research has been able to disclose. Dated Nashville, Tennessee, December 8, 1864, it read:

> The wind is whistling round the house, the cannon booming in the distance and my heart is aching for the houseless, homeless, destitute women whose husbands are in the Union Army, fighting for their country's life. Oh, my children, turn your thoughts away from every vain and superficial wish, that you may have at least a mite to give to the needy. Suffering is no name to apply to the many I see destitute of home and place to lay their head. You know how like a cool draught of water to a thirsty soul, is a letter to me from home; and you know I would write if I could, but my time is not my own.

When the report reached her that Sherman was in Savannah, Mother George became eager to return to the troops. She reported to the agent of the Sanitary Commission at Indianapolis. Thereafter she returned to Fort Wayne for a few days to await a new assignment. She now learned that Agents of the Indiana Sanitary Commission were about to leave New York City for Savannah; she departed immediately to join them. By an oversight, however, transportation and a pass were not provided for Mother George and the other agents sailed without her.

Without a pass it was impossible to procure

transportation or to pierce the Confederate lines. Eliza George went to Washington, D. C. hoping to get a pass. While waiting for the War Department to fumble through the red tape and make out her papers, she called on Dorothy Dix, Civilian figurehead of the yet unorganized Army Nurse Corps. Mrs. Dix urged Mother George to go to Wilmington, North Carolina, where nursing help was desperately needed. Wilmington had just fallen before Union forces; civilian and military suffering was intense.

The troops from her own Hoosier state were always her prime concern. She feared that with Mrs. Dix, she would lose her identity as a representative of Indiana. Therefore she hesitated to accept the new assignment, but not for long. The authorities granted the elderly Hoosier's condition that she be allowed to devote herself especially to such Indiana volunteers as she might find at Wilmington. Simultaneously with Mother George's arrival at Wilmington, 11,000 Union prisoners were transferred thither from the stockade at Salisbury. Their condition was deplorable. "Two thousand of them had not a whole garment upon their bodies; 200 had lost their feet by frost." Mother George now devoted herself completely to these sufferers.

Mother George literally worked herself to death to provide some degree of comfort for these liberated P.O.W.'s. Through long daylight hours she supervised the manufacture of clothing. At night she nursed the sufferers in the long rows of hospital tents. Such exertions would exact their toll in a hurry, even in a much younger person. For more than 2 years she had taken only brief periods of rest. She had little resistance to ward off an attack of the typhoid fever which raged among the troops she was tending. Suddenly her system gave way. The Indiana Sanitary Commission, on receiving the news, immediately

sent Dr. William H. Wishard to her relief. For a brief period she improved and preparations were made to return her to Fort Wayne. She died, however, before these preparations could be completed, on May 9, 1865. Her remains were returned to Fort Wayne and on May 16, 1865, interred with military honors in Lindenwood Cemetery.

On December 30 of the same year, the Lindenwood Board on the petition of Sol D. Bayless granted permission for the Indiana Sanitary Commission and the Ladies Aid Society of Fort Wayne to erect a monument to Mrs. E. E. George on their grounds. The inscription on the granite shaft which still stands today reads:

> Mrs. Eliza E. George
> Born Oct. 20, 1808 at
> Bridport, Vt. Died at
> Wilmington, N. C.
> May 9, 1865
>
> . . . after faithfully aiding with her friendly hands and cheering with her Christian voice the sick and wounded of our Army on the march, battlefields and in the hospitals over 3 years, the heroine fell at her post, honored and loved by all that knew her.

Mother George stands in the first rank in the long list of persons eminent in Fort Wayne's long history. Her career of service to her country is a matter of record, but the half century of her life prior to that time is shrouded in mystery.

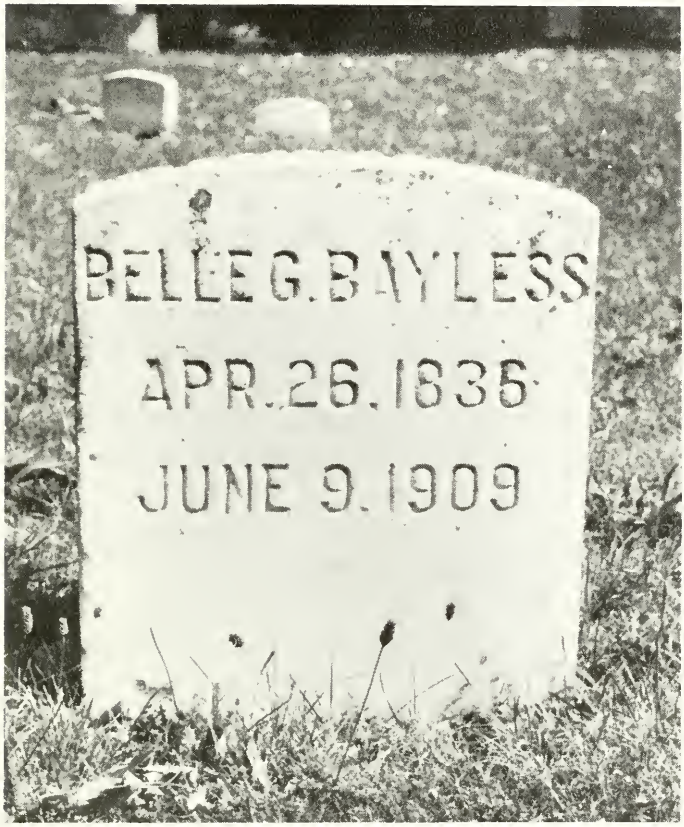
At the time of her death, Mother George was a patriotic, devout widow, the loving mother of three grown daughters. From the facts available today, the

story all but ends here.

Mrs. George was interred in Lindenwood Cemetery in the Sion Bass family plot as are two of her daughters. The only marker today for Mother George's last resting place is the Sanitary Commission Monument across the road. In 1909 her daughter, Belle, who had married into the Bayless family, died, was cremated and her ashes interred in her mother's grave. The marker now reads Belle G. Bayless, but if you look closely at the top of it, you can just make out the inscription, "Our Mother George."

Next to that joint grave is that of Mary Hamilton who died in 1856, but more important to this story is the fact that she was born in Middlebury, Vermont, in 1783, just a few miles from Mrs. George's birthplace in Bridport.

It was the will and death certificate of Belle Bayless, discovered recently in the St. Joseph, Michigan County Courthouse that has shed the most light on the mysterious private life of Eliza George. It settled for all time the reason why Mrs. George and two of her daughters were buried in the Sion Bass family plot, by revealing the existence of a third daughter, Eliza M., who married Colonel Bass. Mrs. Bass (ne George) was born April 18, 1834, in New York. Although the actual marriage record could not be located, there seems to be no doubt that it was she and not Eliza Bayless, as was long believed, that was the wife of Colonel Bass when he left to give his life in the War Between the States. According to faint old records located at the Trinity Episcopal Church, the Widow Bass remarried, this time to W. W. Burritt, on May 26, 1868, six years after Colonel Bass was mortally wounded at Shiloh. The ceremony was performed in the Bass parlour at 9 p.m. on that date by the Rev. Joseph S. Lange, the inscription reads.



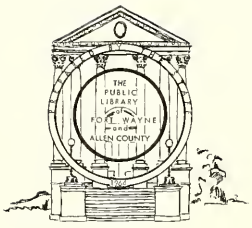
This stone, located in the Lindenwood plot of her famous son-in-law, Sion Bass, is the only marker for the final resting place of Mother George. Only a search of the cemetery records disclosed the fact the ashes of Belle Bayless had been interred in her mother's (Mrs. George) grave. Careful examination of the top of this stone discloses the weathered words, "Our Mother George." A century later, these barely visible words, still bring a thrill to the hearts of the very few who know the legend of Fort Wayne's greatest heroine.

History fails to record the fate of Mr. Burritt, but Eliza M. Bass, as her death certificate reads, died February 13, 1914, in Sioux City, Iowa, where she had been living with a daughter, Mrs. Georgia Black.

What strange twist of fate held the George sisters together even after their marriage will probably never be known. It is a fact, however, that sometime after the end of the Civil War, each of them left Fort Wayne. Mrs. Belle Bayless, Mrs. Jane (Jennie) M. Jones and Mrs. Eliza M. Bass in September of 1906 were all living in Benton Harbor, Mich.

The private life of Fort Wayne's great Civil War heroine will remain forever a mystery, but the scanty facts that are available might lead to a conclusion like this: (1) That Mary Hamilton was the mother of Eliza George. (2) That Eliza and W. L. George married in the east, moving to New York State and eventually to Kentucky. (3) That Mary Hamilton, Eliza George and her three daughters came to Fort Wayne prior to 1856 and that Mary was nursemaid or "Nanny" to the growing young Sion Bass family. (4) That on the death of Mary Hamilton, Eliza took over the job, holding it until her departure for the wars exactly one year after the death of Sion Bass. Beyond these conclusions, the facts are too sketchy even for conjecture.

Perhaps some day, the true story of the entire life of Eliza George, Fort Wayne's greatest heroine, will be known.


THE
PUBLIC
LIBRARY
OF
FORT WAYNE
AND
ALLEN COUNTY

HECKMAN
BINDERY INC.
JUN 95
Bound-To-Please® N. MANCHESTER, INDIANA 46962